

LGA Briefing: Consideration of amendment to Clause 1 of Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill

9th September 2011



LGA support for keeping 'Police Commissions' amendment within the Bill

During its passage through the House of Lords, Clause 1 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility was amended by a coalition of Peers, and a new clause inserted creating a **Police Commission for each police force, instead of a directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner.**

Clause 1 as amended is now due for consideration in the House of Commons as part of Parliamentary 'ping pong'. **The LGA supports the Police Commission model over that of directly elected Police Commissioners and urges MPs to support this newly added model and approve its insertion into the Bill¹.**

What is a Police Commission?

A Police Commission would be made up of a Police and Crime Panel and a Police and Crime Commissioner. However the Commissioner would be appointed by the Panel from amongst its members. The Commissioner would still be responsible for holding the chief constable to account, setting local policing priorities, agreeing strategic policing plans, setting the police precept and setting the police force budget. The Panel would continue to hold responsibility for robustly scrutinising the work of the Commissioner.

The Police Commission model would therefore likely see a **councillor appointed as Commissioner** from amongst the members of the Police and Crime Panel (although co-opted members could also be appointed). Given the strategic role of councillors, and their knowledge of their place and residents, this would provide a real and effective link between communities and the decisions being made on their behalf.

Why should the Police Commission be supported?

The LGA agrees that local accountability needs to be improved and communities should be given a say in how their streets are policed. However the **LGA does not believe introducing directly elected Commissioners is the best way to do this since it could weaken the ability of the police, councils and other public services to cut crime. It could also seriously fragment local partnerships** as a result of conflicting council / Commissioner electoral mandates. The LGA therefore

¹ Introduction of the Police Commission model requires the approval of amendments 1, 2, 4 and 6 as listed on amendment paper, available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2010-2012/0225/2012225.1-4.html>

developed an **alternative model**² last year for improving police accountability in England, based on existing best practice.

The LGA model is similar to the Police Commission model passed by the House of Lords, and as a result **we support the amendment** which bridges the differing perspectives on how police accountability should be improved. **The Police Commission model would still give communities a single voice to champion policing in their area.**

The Police Commission model keeps authority over policing within the remit of local government and ultimately saves money and reduces the transition costs from the existing police authority model. Those **councillors appointed as commissioners would hold democratic authority** as elected representatives of their area and could be held directly accountable by any residents or businesses through frequent surgeries and, most obviously, through the ballot box.

Councils' existing role in community safety

Councils play a fundamental role in combating crime, for example

- funding Police Community Support Officers;
- providing CCTV and street lighting;
- dealing with alcohol-related disorder;
- tackling fly-tipping, rogue traders, and benefits fraud; and
- providing services for ex-offenders.

Councils are also heavily involved in **preventative work** such as youth activities, providing housing for ex-offenders, and dealing with problem families.

Councils are also key members of **Community Safety Partnerships** whose bring together local partners including the police to help in the fight to cut crime. **This close working with the police proved invaluable during last month's riots and their aftermath**, with sharing intelligence and CCTV images resulting in the arrest of hundreds of offenders. This vital partnership work risks being fractured if councils are given a back seat in setting priorities on tackling crime and the causes of crime, with police commissioners more focused on short-term populist policies.

Given the expertise held by councillors as a result of such work, in addition to their knowledge of the community safety priorities of their constituents, the **LGA believes a Councillor would be best placed to fulfil the role of Commissioner through the Police Commission model proposed by the new clause.** The Community Safety portfolio holder on the local council would be ideally placed to take up this role given their detailed knowledge of community safety issues in the local area.

² This model looks to: reinforce links between neighbourhood policing, councillors & local residents; integrate police within councils at a management level; and offer real financial savings. The LG Group model was published in July 2010: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/12504618>